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Controlling Fertility in China:  
The Case of Some Kwangtung Areas

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CONTROLLING FERTILITY IN CHINA:  
THE CASE OF SOME KWANGTUNG AREAS\*

by

Pedro Pak-tao Ng

\* This article is largely the result of a research trip taken by a group of Chinese sociologists, including the author, from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in December 1976 to the following cities in Kwangtung Province, China: K'ai-ping, Hsin-hui, Chiang-men, Fo-shan, and Kwangchow. Two rural communes were visited rather intensively: Huan-ch'eng Commune (population: 59,000) of Hsin-hui Hsien and Ta-li Commune (population: 68,000) of Nan-hai Hsien. Another commune, Ch'ang-sha Commune (population: 59,500) of K'ai-ping Hsien, though not actually visited, was also introduced to us in detail by officials of K'ai-ping. The trip was arranged as part of a research project studying the role of the people's communes in the social and economic development of the People's Republic of China. Started in the summer of 1976 under the auspices of the Social Research Centre of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the project has been supported by a special grant from the Trustees of Lingnan University. Professor C.K. Yang of the Sociology Department of Pittsburgh University has provided valuable intellectual guidance and various supportive efforts to the research team. In 1976-77, the project was conducted under the leadership of Mr. S.L. Wong, senior lecturer in sociology until 1977, without whose insight and experience the many tasks in launching the project and the field trip in December 1976 would not have been accomplished. The present project coordinator is Dr. Rance Lee, director of the Social Research Centre.

CONTROLLING FERTILITY IN CHINA:  
THE CASE OF SOME KWANGTUNG AREAS

1. What is Planned Fertility in China?

China has the world's largest population, currently estimated at 850 to 900 million.<sup>1</sup> To undertake the building and development of such a populous nation within a relatively short span of time since the establishment of Communist rule in 1949 is no simple task, considering the shattered and backward condition China found itself in the past. The present "socialist construction" in China calls for a series of radical changes and reformulations and requires that the whole nation unite its strength on all fronts of social and economic development in a well planned and hence highly organized fashion. This is clearly demonstrated in the "planned fertility" (chi-hua sheng-yü) campaign.

"Planned fertility" in China is basically a programme of family size limitation mounted in both urban and rural areas. Not only is it an official policy set in line with the general theme of socialist construction, but it is also a truly widespread campaign, as far as available documents and personal observations show, that is, supported with substantial fervour by virtually all segments of China's population.

There are three major characteristics of the planned fertility campaign in China. First, it has a conspicuous and inherent ideological component. Its rationale, as will be described later in this paper, is couched not so much in terms of the benefits of one's own family or the married couple themselves as in terms of the uses planned fertility has for serving the country's socialist construction. Second, the mobilization of resources in support of the campaign at present is as thorough and pervasive as can be conceived. Leadership and guidance to promote and steer the campaign is provided at all administrative levels, with mass participation in various forms of discussion and study (hsüeh-hsi) that are organized and sustained in practically all areas of life. Third, the campaign is closely supported by and integrated with the health service system. In particular, for example, barefoot doctors and health care teams from health stations or hospitals penetrate the rural areas to help disseminate contraceptive knowledge and devices.

Although an account of the historical development of the planned fertility campaign in China is not intended in this essay, it may be helpful here to mention very briefly a few facts to provide some background information.<sup>2</sup> In the first few years of the People's Republic, little was mentioned of population problems or population policy. Official

advocacy of birth control did not begin to emerge until around 1954 and 1955, following the 1953 census, with nationwide implementation of propaganda in 1956 following instructions issued by the Ministry of Public Health. The campaign since then was kept in abeyance twice, first in the years of the Great Leap Forward (late 50's) and then for several years at the time of the Cultural Revolution (late 60's). It was only since the turn of the decade (1970) that the planned fertility campaign entered a new and more positive stage of development.

## 2. Rationale for Planned Fertility

Since planned fertility is a national policy, its implementation as an action programme must include careful explanation to the people of the rationale for practising planned fertility. This serves to give the programme the general motivational support of the masses. In the context of the present Chinese socialist society, it also provides an opportunity to strengthen the masses' ideological awareness because the Chinese view parenthood in close association with the country's overall development. Thus, in a widely circulated booklet, Questions and Answers Concerning Knowledge of Planned Fertility, it is clearly stated:

It is an established policy of our country that population is to grow in a planned manner. In our country, production of society proceeds in a planned manner, and this requires that the growth of population proceed in a planned manner too. Planned fertility is definitely not some individual matter with no bearing on the larger situation: it is a great event with implications for national well-being, recasting of customs, and transformation of the world.<sup>3</sup>

The appeal to health is one of the arguments made for practising planned fertility. "Late, sparse, and few" (wan, hsi, shao) is widely publicized as the guiding principle for planned fertility. That is, it is better to have children at a relatively late time (women are encouraged not to give birth until after the age of 25), at longer intervals, and in fewer numbers. This way, the energy and general health condition of the married couple will not be unfavourably affected. If all married couples do likewise, it is argued, the health of the whole population will benefit. It may be noted that this is very much in line with China's policy to raise the health standards of the people and to stress the development of their physical aptitude.

In addition to the appeal to health, which is primarily utilitarian in nature, there are several other rationales underlying fertility planning that are more ideological in appeal, namely, bringing up new generations, raising work efficiency, and building new customs and in effect a new society.



Establishing better conditions for bringing up the next generation--If the number of children is small, their parents are in a better position to provide them with a better education in a very broad sense of the term. In China, children are considered the future bearers of the socialist revolution: parents are expected to share the task of educating their children in Marxism-Leninism and the thoughts of Mao Tse Tung. If children are brought into the world in a planned manner by their parents, it is argued that the state will be in a better position to make proper arrangements for these children's learning, work, and participation in various spheres of the socialist revolution.

Raising efficiency in work and political awareness--If the principle of "late, sparse, and few" is closely observed, more time and attention may be devoted to work, especially in the case of mothers. China is now trying to mobilize all possible resources in the process of its economic development and nation building. Under the well publicized directive "grip the revolution and promote production," (chua ke-ming, ts'u sheng-ch'an) virtually all men and women who are capable of work are expected to carry out their duties or participate in various forms of production. At the same time, it is argued that by practising fertility planning parents have more time and energy for political study and for developing

a concern for the affairs of the country. In China, almost everyone is involved in some kind of hsueh-hsi which is often integrated with work. From the point of view of the Chinese themselves, work efficiency is built upon a solid political awareness. The higher the level of political awareness, the better prepared the worker or the peasant is for accepting and appreciating the meaning of his or her work under the banner of the socialist revolution.

Eradicating the old and fostering the new to promote equality of the sexes--The planned fertility campaign is often described as "a class struggle in the realm of ideology" and "a revolution to remove old customs and to forcefully criticize old thinking and old concepts." Such traditional Confucianist sayings as "the most serious form of impiety is not to have offsprings" and "men are more respectable than women" are now considered wrong and evil. Similarly, the old thinking that "childbirths are all determined by fate" is now severely criticized. In the old days, the fact that a woman did not have children could constitute a cause for her being divorced by her husband. The woman who had given birth to a son was likely to be better accepted by her mother-in-law because of the importance attached to having male heirs to the family under a strong emphasis on patrilineage. All this is now considered by the Communists to be exploitative thinking

constricting the potential contribution of women to China's construction. Women now should and must "shoulder half of heaven" on all fronts of the socialist revolution. The fact that numerous types of work roles at all levels are filled by women; as we easily observed in our trip, is clear evidence that women have a considerable share in the social, economic, and political life in China today.<sup>4</sup> There is one quotation of Chairman Mao to which many cadres and other officials often referred when explaining the implications of the planned fertility campaign for changing old customs and liberating women in society: "The times have changed, men and women are the same. What men comrades can do, women comrades can do, too." It seems that this particular instruction has been well carried out.

### 3. Preferred Fertility Norms

As mentioned above, "late, sparse, and few" is the basic guiding principle for age at marriage, children spacing, and total number of children. While there are no legal sanctions to enforce this principle, it is our impression that tremendous popular support has been mustered for it in many ways, so that compliance is generated more or less under a combination of ubiquitous ideological persuasion and pervasive social pressure.

### Late Marriage

Late marriage is now widely encouraged and indeed expected among the younger population. The "approved" age at first marriage is 27 for men and 24 for women in the cities and 25 for men and 23 for women in the rural areas. Of course, there are occasionally marriages contracted at an earlier age, but these are exceptions. We were repeatedly informed of cases where the couple wanted to postpone marriage as far as practicable. Indeed, such postponements are typically regarded as a good thing and are to be emulated.

### Number of Children and Children Spacing

It is popularly advocated that wherever possible a married couple should have no more than two children, regardless of their sex, and that the two children should be spaced four to five years apart to give the couple ample time for planning and the wife better physiological preparation for the second conception. Naturally, not all couples do in fact have exactly two children. There is variation in family size from place to place and from one commune to another. Based on the reported population figures for three communes,<sup>5</sup> however, it seems that the norm of two children is observed reasonably well. The average size of a household is 4 persons in Ch'ang-sha Commune of K'ai-ping Hsien, 5.6 persons in Huang-ch'eng Commune of Hsin-hui Hsien, and 4.3 persons in

Ta-li Commune of Nan-hai Hsien. While a "household" may not be the same as a "family" (in the sense of a nuclear family) in composition, and there was no sure way to check on the accuracy of these figures, they do suggest a pattern toward small families of two children.

#### 4. Contraceptive Methods Used

The most widely used contraceptive method in the areas we visited is the IUD (intrauterine device). Oral contraceptive pills are also much used, but they are not as popular as the loop because, according to one gynaecologist at the Hsien Hospital of K'ai-ping, it is quite easy for working women to forget taking the pill regularly. We were informed that experiments were being conducted on new types of pills that need to be taken only once a month or once several months for greater convenience. One type of pill that was referred to several times during our trip is the "visit spouse" pill (t'an ch'in wan) for use by women who are joined for a brief period by their husbands who work in a distant area. This is actually a set of seven pills, two of which are to be taken on the first evening followed by a pill an evening for five consecutive evenings.

After the birth of the second child, many women opt for sterilization which is easily available at the health clinics

operated by the communes. The setting and removal of IUDs is readily performed at the health stations operated by production brigades. In fact, many of the barefoot doctors assigned to serve the production brigades in the communes are capable of performing IUD settings and removals and, in some cases, even sterilization operations. Such skills are now becoming part of the training of barefoot doctors whose responsibility is mainly to serve the health and medical needs of the rural areas.

Abortion is perfectly legal and may be performed free of charge when normal contraceptive measures have failed or when the pregnant woman is not fit to give birth owing to ill health. However, the Chinese emphasize that abortion is only a remedial measure and should not be relied on to achieve planned fertility.

In the case of men, great publicity is given to vasectomy which is encouraged after the birth of the second child. We came across a number of officials who took pride in telling us that they have been sterilized, although sometimes after having had more than two children. Again, male sterilization is easily available at the communes' health clinics. All sterilization operations, male and female, are provided free of charge.

We were told that all contraceptive pharmaceuticals and devices are centrally provided and distributed by the state. Members in a commune can obtain the pills and IUDs that they need from the commune's health clinic free of charge. Alternatively, a whole array of personnel, such as women cadres of production teams, barefoot doctors, midwives and other staff of clinics, and planned fertility propagandists, can bring the contraceptives everywhere they are needed. Furthermore, contraceptives are also obtainable free from drugstores and various other shops which keep a special counter to stock and distribute the contraceptives.

#### 5. Reported Achievements

While it is difficult to obtain accurate population growth rate figures for China as a whole or even for the province of Kwangtung alone, the officials we met at the hsien level and at various levels within a particular commune were quite enthusiastic in informing us recent trends of population growth within their region or district. Thus, for example, the rate of natural increase in the population of K'ai-ping Hsien (current population: 560,000) was 21 per thousand in 1966 when the programme of planned fertility was activated in the hsien but decreased to 8 per thousand in 1976. In Ch'ang-sha Commune of K'ai-ping Hsien, the rate

of natural increase in 1976 was as low as 6 per thousand. Over 86 per cent of reproductive age married couples are now practising planned fertility, and over 90 per cent of all new marriages in 1976 complied with marriage ages advocated by late marriage. With these achievements, K'ai-ping Hsien is regarded as a progressive hsien in the planned fertility campaign. In Huan-ch'eng Commune of Hsin-hui Hsien, the crude birth rate dropped from 22 per thousand in 1972 to 13 per thousand in 1976. The change in some production brigades within the commune is even more impressive. For example, in T'ien-lü Brigade of Huan-ch'eng Commune, the crude birth rate dropped from something like 50 per thousand or more several years ago to a present low of 18 per thousand, according to birth figures reported by an official of the brigade.<sup>6</sup>

Despite achievements in decreasing birth rates, the campaign to limit family size is not without difficulties. Officials openly admitted that a major obstacle has been the persistence of traditional values here and there supporting the ideals of large families and the preference of boys over girls.<sup>7</sup> Such "feudal" thinking still exists, we were told, particularly in the rural areas, although not as noticeable and powerful as in the early sixties when the planned fertility campaign was in its initial stage of development. One cadre mentioned that the situation varies somewhat from



place to place and that, for instance, the campaign is still encountering relatively strong resistance in the Swatow area. Planned fertility promoters are, nevertheless, rather confident and optimistic about overcoming difficulties. In the words of a high-ranking cadre of K'ai-ping Hsien, "Those who adhere to old thinking must be changed gradually through thought education. If the advantages of and the need for planned fertility are explained and talked about sufficiently, they will eventually accept it." How the values of late marriage and planned fertility may be accepted will be described in some detail later.

## 6. Propaganda Work and Channels of Mass Socialization

### Organization of Propaganda

The way in which propaganda work is organized in promoting the planned fertility programme is an excellent example of China's seriousness and all-out effort in undertaking the many tasks of building a socialist country. First of all, the programme is under the leadership of Party committee members at virtually all levels, both in cities and in rural areas. It is mainly through this chain of leadership that uniformity of basic interpretation of the nation-wide planned fertility policy and coordination of propaganda work at various locations are achieved. Secondly,

"planned fertility work leadership groups" (chi-hua sheng-yü kung-tso ling-tao hsiao-tsu) or similar bodies are set up in cities, factories, communes as a whole, and production brigades within a commune.<sup>8</sup> In large cities, the work leadership group is likely to be a specially constituted group charged with full-time responsibility of promoting planned fertility in the municipality. The group is under the supervision of the city's revolutionary committee, augmented by health agencies and other related educational agencies of the municipality, as in the case of Chiang-men which we visited. In other units, however, the leadership group to promote planned fertility usually consists of members who carry other concurrent duties in the unit or simply of certain members of the revolutionary committee in that unit. In any case, one could safely say that there is probably no work organization or production unit, however large or small, in which there is not an organized effort to promote planned fertility among the members of that organization or unit.

In addition to the institutionalization of variously constituted planned fertility work leadership groups, the responsibility of actually supervising and carrying out propaganda work falls on the shoulders of a large number of individuals and groups. Thus, for example, in Huan-ch'eng

Commune, in addition to the Commune's leadership group, the Commune organizes a planned fertility propaganda team which would visit various production brigades to publicize the meaning, advantages, and technical aspects of planned fertility. This team, called the "planned fertility forefront team," (chi-hua sheng-yü hsien-ch'ien tui) is composed of men and women cadres, barefoot doctors, and midwives. There are also planned fertility propaganda groups at the production brigade level consisting of production team leaders, women cadres, midwives, and barefoot doctors. These groups would frequently visit households in the commune to publicize planned fertility and to offer advice and assistance such as who ought to undergo sterilization. The leadership group and the propaganda teams compile their own propaganda materials for distribution to the households or for discussion purposes in "study" sessions. The women affairs director (fu-nü chu-jen) of each production brigade and the women cadres of each production team are particularly responsible for the organization of study sessions and study groups in their respective units on a fairly regular basis. This way, propaganda on planned fertility is both penetrative and pervasive, even in vast rural areas. Each commune undertakes the task of propaganda in more or less the same pattern, and this proceeds not haphazardly but in a well organized and

coordinated manner. As will be made clear in the following section, the masses do not have to seek out knowledge and advice concerning planned fertility. On the contrary, what they need in order to achieve the purposes of planned fertility is brought to them in many different ways.

#### Educating the People: Channels of Mass Socialization

Merely having a network of propaganda bodies is not sufficient to change the masses' attitudes and values in such a way as to correspond to the rationale and objectives of planned fertility. There must be mechanisms to ensure that this change will happen. Just as the organization of propaganda work is pervasive and well-coordinated, so the actual channels of socialization to mobilize mass support of planned fertility are ubiquitous and mutually reinforcing.

Wall posters--There are numerous opportunities for peasants and workers to be exposed to propaganda concerning planned fertility as displayed in blackboard posters<sup>9</sup> and big character posters in public places, offices, factories, and hospitals. Thus, for example, we saw on one street of a production brigade of Huan-ch'eng Commune a large panel of wall posters on planned fertility. This panel occupied an area of roughly sixteen feet by four feet, consisting of a set of eight posters each measuring approximately two feet by three feet. The heading, written in large and tidy bold-

face characters, read: "Practise late marriage and planned fertility for the revolution." (wei ke-ming shih-hsing wan-hun ho chi-hua sheng-yü) The eight posters, all nicely written, outlined the basic meaning of the planned fertility programme and, in question-and-answer format, explained how to "carry out well the tasks required by planned fertility." One of the eight posters had this statement as its own heading: "Get to know thoroughly the important meaning of planned fertility." (shen-k'e jen-shih chi-hua sheng-yü ti chung-ta i-i) Its content stressed that the planned fertility programme was not a haphazardly developed regional policy but a centrally planned policy that was part of the overall socialist construction programme of the country. The poster also attributed the initiation of the planned fertility programme to Chairman Mao, quoting his directive that "population cannot be uncontrolled." (jen-k'ou fei k'ung-chi pu-k'o)

Newspapers--Newspapers are also a source of fertility socialization. They carry reports of implementations of late marriage and planned fertility in various places and reports of how difficulties have been tackled. These reports are written by Party committees in the communes and production brigades, individual brigade members, and correspondents of the newspaper. In these reports, one

often reads about the importance of practising late marriage and planned fertility for the sake of the country and the collectivity (e.g., the commune). In one account in the Renmin Ribao (People's Daily), for example, concerning planned fertility activities in a fishing commune near Wushi in Chiang-su Province,<sup>10</sup> it was mentioned that much of the progress in the fishery productivity of the commune and hence improvement in the standard of living of the commune members was brought about by the increased participation of women in productive labour and in other affairs of the commune after they had practised planned fertility. The account was punctuated with laudatory statements, such as "planned fertility is simply good; it strengthens both men and women, and boosts their willingness to struggle." Concerning the contribution of women, it was said that "they could fish once in a boat or till the fields once on land, and would 'run ahead' in meetings and in study."

In another account, also in the Renmin Ribao, that highlights the liberation of the female labour force as a result of planned fertility in Nan-k'ung Hsien, Hopei Province,<sup>11</sup> it was reported that more women were able to devote time to political study and various political activities such as taking part in organizing propaganda teams to launch criticisms against Lin Piao and Confucianism. They

were also able to participate actively in technological reforms by, for instance, serving as agricultural technicians, joining scientific experimenting groups, and operating agricultural experimental stations. Furthermore, they could, along with men, contribute to irrigational construction work which is vital to the success of agricultural development, especially at a time when China is urging all communes to "learn from Tachai in agriculture."

Similar accounts referring to various localities are quite typical in the newspapers. They serve to bring to the attention of the masses evidences of how planned fertility has actually contributed to raising productivity and to cultivating an awareness that everywhere the planned fertility programme is being implemented with vigour and great momentum. In these accounts, planned fertility is often described as a widely promoted action programme with significant implications for the development and well-being of the whole country. At the same time, attention is given to the fact that in the course of implementing the planned fertility programme, many difficulties have emerged which must be coped with patiently and thoroughly. Sometimes, these difficulties include inadequate understanding among leadership groups and individuals--including even health and medical personnel--of the true meaning (in political

terms) of planned fertility. It is often through repetitive and in-depth study in groups, according to the newspaper accounts, that correct thinking and understanding may be obtained.

Books--Books to urge the people to practise planned fertility and to explain all the basic technical aspects such as conception and contraceptive methods are easily available for purchase in book shops.<sup>12</sup> However, not all books on planned fertility deal with purely technical matters. There are books devoted primarily to socializing the people to the ideas, attitudes, and values surrounding the ideological implications of planned fertility. In one such book, the messages are presented in the form of songs and brief dramatic performances.<sup>13</sup> One of the items in this book is a very short "play," entitled "Late Marriage is Good," that involves three characters: Yen, a 50-year-old hard-working and politically progressive animal feeder in a production team; his somewhat old-fashioned wife; and their 23-year-old daughter, Kwei-lien, who is a high-spirited woman militia in the commune. One day, according to the story, Yen went home after attending a pledge rally in the production brigade in support of planned fertility and late marriage, to do some personal persuasion with his wife who had been eager to marry off Kwei-lien as soon as possible. The persuasion was soon



joined by Kwei-lien herself. Yen reminded his wife that this kind of thinking was feudalistic, capitalistic, and revisionist, which must be criticized and rejected, and that forcing Kwei-lien to marry young would only disrupt her efforts in learning the thoughts of Chairman Mao, studying, and participating in productive labour and military training. In her own defence, Kwei-lien added, "There is no need to hasten my marriage as I am merely twenty-three. Waiting for another two years will not be too long! You see, mother, I am a revolutionary youth in the age of the thoughts of Mao Tse Tung. I will not fall into the trap of such crooks as Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao (who allegedly were not against early marriage), and will not succumb to the personal pleasures of a small family (i.e., she did not want to form her own family yet). I will instead devote my fiery youth to the great revolutionary enterprise."<sup>14</sup> As a result, Kwei-lien's mother was persuaded and she admitted how ignorant and imperceptive she had been.

Stories such as the one just described are rather typical in planned fertility's propaganda material. Reading these stories, one could infer that the youth in China nowadays may have a considerable socializing influence on the older generation. The young, whose role was essentially inferior and submissive under parental authority in the

traditional Chinese family, are now given a new role not just in the context of the family but in the society at large as well.

Wen-i performances--Messages that urge people to practise late marriage and planned fertility through criticizing old bourgeois Confucian concepts and advocating new socialist values appear not only in newspapers and books but also in a large variety of wen-i (literature and art) performances which are frequently brought to the masses in the communes by both professional and amateur wen-i propaganda teams. Included in such performances are folk songs and dances, two-man skits, and short plays. Like other means of communication, wen-i performances are extensively used to transmit ideas and values supporting the causes of China's socialist construction. Indeed, there is hardly any kind of literary or artistic work that does not relate in one way or another to ideology and politics. Since planned fertility is expected to be of concern to everybody in the country, it is only natural that the programme must be given publicity through all possible channels of communication.

Wen-i performances typically combine elements of entertainment and education, although apparently stressing the latter more than the former. Their content is often closely related to the daily life experiences of the people.

In fact, we were told that members of the professional teams often participate in productive labour in the communes to gain a first-hand feeling of peasants' life, so that the performances they bring to the communes may be relevant and hence useful to the peasants. Thus, it is not surprising that wen-i performances, utilizing auditory and visual stimulation and presenting messages through familiar personalities and events, can be a very powerful means of socialization.

Let me cite one example to illustrate the use of wen-i performances to propagandize new concepts, in this case the de-emphasis on male preference. In the city of Chiang-men, we had the opportunity of watching a professional wen-i performance one evening in the hotel where we were staying. One item in the performance was a kind of narrated song entitled "Auntie Erh takes a son-in-law." (Erh-shen ch'ü nü-hsü) The relatively unusual nature of the phenomenon, which is now gaining wider attention in China, is already revealed in the Chinese title, for the word ch'ü is normally used to refer to taking a daughter-in-law into the family. The main idea in this song is that it should not matter at all if one has daughters but no sons because the man whom the daughter marries may establish his household with the girl's family and is then legally entitled to inherit the

family's property. This is what is often referred to as "the man coming to the woman's family." (nan tao nü chia)

The following is a synopsis of the song:

Auntie Erh had no sons but only one daughter, Ah Li. She was worrying deeply over Ah Li's marriage, for Ah Li was already 26 and had postponed her marriage several times to participate in irrigation construction work. Now, Ah Li was going to marry Ah Hui, aged 30 and committee member of the Party branch. Much to Auntie Erh's displeasure, however, Ah Li wanted Ah Hui to live with her family. Just as Auntie Erh and Ah Li were arguing, Ah Hui appeared and explained that the times had changed and that the revolution must continue to break old customs and habits including the traditional practice of marrying a girl into a man's family. In a group meeting later, it was publicly announced that Auntie Erh now had both a daughter and a son. In the midst of subsequent celebrations, Ah Hui displayed what he had with him in his knapsack: a hoe, a set of Chairman Mao's writings, and a book on planned fertility.

Similar stories are told in various kinds of wen-i performances, just as they are told in books, to commend "new people and new things" (hsin-jen hsin-shih) and to stress the need to "change old habits and customs." (i-feng i-su) This reflects quite well the effort undertaken by the Chinese to promote an awareness of planned fertility in a broad context--one that underscores the importance of and need for societal transformation--hoping thereby to achieve better results in motivational work directed towards the masses.

## 7. Fertility Socialization in the Communes

The key to successful implementation of the planned fertility programme, as the Chinese see it, is to establish correct thinking among the masses and to rely not on external coercion (e.g., antinatalistic legislation) but on an awareness of the need for planned fertility generated among the masses themselves. The term szu-hsiang kung-tso, or "thought work," represents the means or process to achieve such an awareness, or indeed, for that matter, any form of political awareness considered desirable. A person whose awareness in the matter of planned fertility is not adequate or who cannot yet appreciate the rationale for practising planned fertility is expected to go through this thought work carefully, normally with the help of others who have advanced more thoroughly in thought. Even those who may be said to have achieved correct thinking are expected to maintain and reinforce their level of correctness by constantly engaging in hsüeh-hsi or "study." Indeed, almost everybody in China is engaged in some form of hsüeh-hsi most or some of the time. This is simply part of life.

While such channels of communication as wall posters, newspapers, books, and wen-i performances are all important in transmitting to the masses information and messages concerning planned fertility, they are relatively impersonal

and therefore may not be capable of catering to the needs and problems experienced by individuals. For this reason, learning and persuasion through interpersonal communication such as happens in hsüeh-hsi meetings becomes especially strategic in facilitating the "thought work" process through which individuals may indeed take to heart what planned fertility is all about. The following is a brief account of such hsüeh-hsi activities in the communes we visited.

Ch'ang-sha Commune, K'ai-p'ing Hsien

Under the leadership of Party committee members in the commune, the women's affairs director organizes hsüeh-hsi meetings at the headquarters of the commune attended by women leaders of the production teams to publicize the advantages of planned fertility. These meetings are normally held quarterly, but may be held more often if needed. In these meetings, participants inform one another of their experiences in practising fertility planning and point to evidences of how their life has improved and productivity increased as a result. Having attended these meetings, the women team leaders in turn organize hsüeh-hsi meetings within their own production team to be participated mainly by reproductive age married couples. We were told that this way an awareness of the advantages of planned fertility is rapidly developed.

While hsueh-hsi meetings concerning planned fertility are usually designed for married women or married couples, propaganda on late marriage is aimed primarily towards unmarried youths in the commune and is commonly heard over wired broadcasts receivable in all households. Publicity on late marriage is also given through wen-i performances at various parts of the commune.

Huan-ch'eng Commune, Hsin-hui Hsien

Hsueh-hsi meetings on planned fertility are held within each production brigade. They are convened jointly by the Party branch secretary of the commune and the women's affairs director of the brigade concerned. Participation is open to all reproductive age couples. The frequency of these meetings is not fixed. During each meeting, participants are divided into ten groups, i.e., eight production teams, one brigade-operated enterprise, and one school. The ten groups first come together in a general meeting, and then break up, with each group to hold its own small meeting. Each small meeting, led by a woman cadre, would normally include the study of planned fertility propaganda material issued by the commune's Party branch or material compiled by the brigade itself. Based on such material, individuals would bring in their personal experiences or observations so that some idea or value related to planned fertility is illustrated and strengthened.

In addition to hsueh-hsi meetings which are usually large gatherings, there are smaller hsüeh-hsi sessions (hsüeh-hsi pan)<sup>15</sup> designed separately for men or for women of different ages, even elderly ones, to engage in discussion and learning of planned fertility in a small group setting. We were informed of two examples which illustrate some of the socializing effects of hsüeh-hsi sessions. They are now outlined as follows.

Example 1--A woman at a hsüeh-hsi session rose to criticize the old notion of "more sons bring more blessings" (to-erh to-fu) by counting her bitter memories. "In the days of the old society, I gave birth to seven children. Was this blissful? No! Most of my children, under the terrible poverty we were suffering, either starved to death or died of sicknesses, leaving me only one son. Where was my blessing? It was just big disaster." This woman, who was living with her son and daughter-in-law, said that she often reminded her daughter-in-law of the terrible past. In this way, her daughter-in-law learned why it was important to plan fertility.

Example 2--An old-time cadre had already had eight children. Although propaganda work of the planned fertility programme had been active for quite a few years since 1971, and despite his having participated in many hsüeh-hsi sessions,



he was still not totally convinced. Many times his wife wanted to be sterilized only to be met with his disapproval. This led to many quarrels in the family. The brigade's propaganda team and other devoted individuals then spent much effort to chat with him at his home to help him understand what actually had gone wrong. Before long, the obstacle was found to be "male dominance thinking" (fu-ch'üan szu-hsiang). He eventually admitted his mistake and agreed that his wife should obtain a sterilization.

As for late marriage, there are hsüeh-hsi sessions for youths held in the evening on dates of "five's and ten's," i.e., on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup> of the month. The focus of study in these sessions is the rationale for late marriage, although planned fertility is also mentioned in a general manner without touching on specific contraceptive methods.

There are also "before-work study" (kung-ch'ien hsüeh-hsi) periods that are held daily before starting work in the fields. Each production team usually constitutes a hsüeh-hsi unit in this period, unless when it is large enough to be divided into groups for discussion purposes. While these periods are designed for studying a variety of subjects that may be relevant to the work of the day, late marriage and planned fertility are often included in the agenda.

At the commune-operated health clinic, which plays an important role in the technical support of planned fertility in the commune, the promotion of planned fertility is undertaken by the gynaecology and pediatrics section of the clinic, consisting of two doctors (one stationed at the clinic, the other on a dispatch basis) and two midwifery personnel. Under the leadership of this section, a special propaganda group is organized to collect facts and experiences of individuals in order to illustrate the importance of planned fertility in a true-life fashion. (chen-jen chen-shih) The section also provides technical (medical) advice to propaganda teams of the commune so that the latter would be in a better position to explain the safety of birth control to the masses some of whom might fear that contraceptive methods would do harm to the body.

Ta-li Commune, Nan-hai Hsien

Hsüeh-hsi and propaganda meetings are organized by brigades with the participation of women's affairs committee members of various production teams as well as members of the planned fertility work leadership groups of the commune and the brigades. These participants usually constitute the core members of the meetings. The emphasis of the meetings, and, indeed, of the promotion of planned fertility in the commune, is "to destroy the four old's and establish

the four new's," (p'o szu-chiu, li szu-hsin) the "four" being thought, culture, customs, and habits. Thus, what planned fertility advocates and cherishes, such as late marriage, two children, no boy preference, and receiving sterilization are all new things regarded as desirable and important in the struggle against the remnants of old thinking. To ensure that the masses are constantly reminded of the importance of planned fertility, persuasive propaganda calling for continuous support of planned fertility is sent regularly through wired broadcasts, which may be heard in all homes, in the morning and especially in the evening.

#### Fertility Targets and Concession

From the foregoing description, it is clear that planned fertility is a matter of public concern. Although there are leadership work groups or committees in the communes to provide guidance and coordination, the actual promotion of fertility planning requires the direct participation and discussion of the masses to generate their own consciousness and to undergo a process of self-education. In this spirit, each commune, each brigade, and each production team is to set down its own fertility target, that is, the number of babies that may be expected to be born, for a given year.<sup>16</sup> The decision on what the target should be is normally based on a review of the collectivity's

fertility performance in previous years and current conditions in the collectivity. Of course, the fertility targets of the production teams and the brigades need to be coordinated so that together they represent the fertility target of the whole commune. One could indeed think of this planning of fertility as a quota system.

To keep the births of babies from exceeding the target or quota, women who are contemplating having babies are to engage in group discussion in order to work out who may have the desired babies first. For instance, it may be decided through such discussion that someone who already has three children should not have any more while another who is still childless after having been married for some time should be given a higher priority. In this way, the group operates to establish a collective plan whereby some will be "allowed" to have births in that year while others will have to wait, or to jang-sheng, meaning to make fertility concessions. We were told that similar arrangements apply also in the cities and that in factories charts are displayed on walls to list those workers who plan to give birth in the current year and those in the year following, thus serving as a reminder for the workers concerned and as a manifest testimony that the planned fertility programme must be seriously carried out.

Emulation and Incentives: Towards Fuller Socialization

To strengthen the effectiveness of socializing the masses to accept the rationale and advantages of planned fertility, two interrelated components of hsüeh-hsi are commonly adopted. One component is learning from the past unpleasant and deplorable experiences of persons who knew no blessing from having many children in the days of the old society. The second component, which may be more important, is learning from the life experiences of individuals, especially local individuals, who are currently practising planned fertility and whose personal accounts should serve to testify what advantages have in fact resulted from such practice and also to dispel any hesitation or fear that some people may still have in the adoption of contraceptive methods. These two mutually reinforcing components are in accordance with the phrase "remember the bitterness of the past and think of the joy of the present" (i-k'u szu-t'ien) which refers to the educational and motivational mechanism generally used in attempting to cast off old and undesirable customs or practices.

To set an example for others to follow, many cadres and commune leaders have adopted contraception, including sterilization. In our conversation with various individuals, we obtained the impression that such cadres and leaders are

quite proud of their having been sterilized and that their examples are often referred to with a tone of respect in various hsüeh-hsi activities.

To further heighten the awareness of the importance of planned fertility among the masses, regional conferences are held annually for "progressive" units and individuals. One such conference was held in Hsin-hui Hsien at the time of our visit. The units (factories, offices, etc.) and individuals who attend these meetings do so through nomination by the masses on the basis of their performance in the promotion of the planned fertility programme. During the meetings, the achievements of the participants, both as unit representatives and as individuals, are reported and commended. For the information and reference of all participants, experiences and commentaries are exchanged to show how planned fertility is promoted in different places. This exercise also serves to reiterate the importance of carrying on the task of the planned fertility programme as part of the great mission of China's socialist construction. After the conference, participants are supposed to bring back with them what they have learned from the conference to their own unit for the benefit of others and also for helping to shape plans for the programme in the following year. The fact that a unit is selected or an individual nominated for participating

in this annual conference is a glory for the unit concerned. It is a common practice that the "progressive" units are awarded certificates to register their outstanding performance in the promotion of planned fertility. Alternatively, thermo flasks with the appropriate words of praise inscribed on them are given to the unit to show appreciation of what the unit has done.

#### 8. The Commune System and Planned Fertility

The present essay has been concerned mainly with how the planned fertility programme is being implemented in some areas in Kwangtung, based largely on the observations obtained and information gathered in a field trip the author took with a group of Chinese sociologists from Hong Kong in December 1976. Owing to the limited number of places visited, what is reported in this essay may not be over-generalized to represent what is being done in all of Kwangtung Province, much less in all of China. Given this qualification, however, we returned with the clear impression that planned fertility in China is a national policy and nation-wide programme launched with great vigour and a high degree of organization. All possible resources for propaganda and socialization are mobilized and utilized. The main principle for promoting an action programme of such scale is that the masses themselves

must be mobilized to take an active part in the programme. Through direct and voluntary participation, they must generate self-initiated support under the state's overall leadership. This was frequently stressed by the people with whom we spoke, as clearly expressed in the slogan, "the state leads, the masses volunteer (support)." (kuo-chia ling-tao, ch'ün-chung tzu-yüan) The same principle applies to promoting planned fertility in the communes. Let us here review the ways in which the commune, as a social, economic and political unit, may facilitate the promotion of the planned fertility programme.

First, the structure of the commune is such that organizational leadership and coordination is provided at all three levels, i.e., the commune level, the production brigade level, and the production team level. Under the unified leadership of the Party branch, linkage units are always present to ensure a smooth flow of communication throughout the commune, even down to the individual commune member. This pattern applies to all matters that are regarded as having relevance to the commune as a whole especially since mobilization of both leadership and popular support of the masses is always a key factor for efficient implementation of any action programme. Thus, what the leadership group at the commune level has decided to carry



out in the promotion of the planned fertility programme is transmitted down to the brigades and the production teams very rapidly. Conversely, the experiences and difficulties in the course of implementation are quickly channelled back from the production team or even household level up to the commune level for reference and review in mapping out further tasks and any necessary improvements. In fact, the success of the planned fertility programme has depended greatly on the remarkable penetrativeness of the organization and coordination of planning and promotional tasks in all units. This style of administration, which is well expressed in the often-used slogan, "there are people to take charge at all levels," (ts'eng-ts'eng yu jen chua) is typical of the Chinese approach to the implementation of a programme of national significance and hence of concern to everyone.

Second, the organization of the commune at all three levels (commune, brigade, production team) is characterized by a high degree of intrapersonal and interpersonal role integration. In intrapersonal role integration, an individual assumes several roles simultaneously. For example, a revolutionary committee member of the commune can also be a teacher, an ideological worker, a peasant, and a fertility planning propagandist. While some of these roles may be more dominant than others at a given time, the fact that a plurality of

roles may be assumed by the same individual is one important means whereby the organization and coordination of work of virtually all kinds in the commune become more efficient and more adaptable to particular circumstances. In interpersonal role integration, several individuals playing different roles work together to carry out the same mission or to achieve a common goal. For instance, a fertility planning propaganda team may consist of revolutionary committee members, women cadres, production team leaders, barefoot doctors, and midwives, all of whom work together in the planning and launching of propaganda work to promote fertility planning throughout the commune. Of course, intrapersonal role integration and interpersonal role integration are mutually complementary. Indeed, insofar as interpersonal role integration is necessary for the rapid mobilization of a basic leadership structure required by the process of planned change, intrapersonal role integration would facilitate such mobilization to the extent that it brings about greater flexibility in the deployment of human resources. With role integration as a guiding organizational principle, individual in different roles may find themselves in a better position to arouse an awareness of the significance of fertility planning and to generate sufficient solidarity among the masses in support of that cause.

Third, being a largely self-governing system, the commune is capable of integrating the planning and provision of education, health, and welfare services in the commune in accordance with local needs. Indeed, the promotion of fertility planning is regarded as very much related to these services. Thus, for example, through the commune's education system, the value of serving the people and the ideology of socialist construction are meticulously transmitted to the young, giving them thereby a solid ideological foundation on which to understand the issue of fertility planning. In health and medical work, barefoot doctors, serving extensively in the communes, play an important role in the dissemination of contraceptive knowledge and provision of contraceptive services (e.g., setting IUDs and giving sterilization operations). Furthermore, the availability of a retirement pension to both men and women--equivalent to something like 70 per cent of their last earned salary--along with the commune's provision of funds specially reserved for the care of the aged, has practically eliminated the relevance and appeal of the traditional notion of "raising children for old age security." (yang-erh fang-lao) Integration is obtained not only in terms of unified and comprehensive planning in all these services but also in terms of ensuring that the planned fertility programme receives maximum institutional support.

Fourth, the commune by definition needs to promote a group identity strong enough to put the needs and well-being of the collectivity before everything else. In fact, respect for and commitment to the needs of the collectivity constitute a highly important and desirable socio-political orientation in China nowadays which every person is expected to learn, accept, and practise. "To serve the people," one of the most frequently used slogans in all areas of life in China, clearly verbalizes this orientation. Life in the commune is predominantly and unmistakably group-oriented. This is shown not only in the basic three-tier organization (commune, brigade, production team) of the commune itself but also in the many group-based activities within each production unit. All individuals are socialized, even from early school days, to appreciate the importance of the group which is often a source or a facilitator of hsüeh-hsi. If commune members have fairly well adapted to a life greatly stressing the importance and well-being of the collectivity, it would not be too surprising that the idea of fertility planning, related so much as it does to the well-being of women and children and the improvement of the productivity of the production unit, has actually gained widespread popular support.

Fifth, participation in productive labour is obviously of prime importance in the commune, especially considering that the commune has quite a number of its own industrial undertakings in addition to agriculture. Liberating women from the constraint of domestic work and child-rearing responsibilities, or at least minimizing such constraints, so that women can contribute to the commune's production is of great concern to all. As mentioned earlier in this essay, a major rationale underlying the promotion of late marriage and fertility planning in China is to enable women to fully exercise their potential to "shoulder half of heaven" by participating in various forms of productive labour. This rationale takes on special relevance in the context of the rural commune where so much effort is made to boost productivity largely on a self-reliance basis. In fact, in addition to participating in productive labour, women also assume many leading positions at all three levels of the commune.

To sum up, the planned fertility programme, as far as we could tell, is making great progress in a number of Kwangtung areas, and probably in many other parts of China as well. The achievements of the programme can be seen not only in terms of the lowering of birth rates or the degree to which the youths are responding to the call of late

marriage, but also in terms of the strength of mass support and participation in various promotional activities. Certainly, the contribution of contraceptive technology and the efficiency of health service networks are noteworthy. In addition, however, the popularity of the programme has depended a great deal on the remarkable penetrativeness of the organization and coordination of promotional tasks in all units. This we clearly observed in the communes. Proceeding hand in hand with planning and coordination is a vast array of hsüeh-hsi processes that make the fullest use of interpersonal persuasion and influence. These processes, as we have seen, constitute probably the most strategic channel of communication to establish in the minds of the masses the significance of late marriage and fertility planning. Through this form of communication, both in group settings and on a one-to-one basis, personal experiences in the practice of late marriage and birth control may be shared, successful models for emulation are rapidly publicized, and consequently a very powerful form of social "pressure" operates to bring about conformity with the new fertility norms and values being promoted. It is our impression that without this type of persuasive communication which goes on continuously at the grass-root level, the planned fertility programme would have lacked meat and

substance entirely. All things considered, therefore, the programme is a fine example of mass socialization which, combining the efforts of people from all walks of life, seeks to steer innovation and implement change for the cause of the socialist construction of China. As far as we can tell, there is nothing quite like it in scale or intensity anywhere else.

FOOTNOTES

1. At the World Population Conference in Bucharest, August 1974, the Chinese delegate reported that China's population had increased nearly 60 per cent from about 500 million in 1950 to nearly 800 million.
2. For a detailed account of the development of China's population policy, see John S. Aird, "Population Policy and Demographic Prospects in the People's Republic of China," in People's Republic of China: An Economic Assessment (A compendium of papers submitted to the Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 220-331; and H. Yuan Tien, China's Population Struggle: Demographic Decisions of the People's Republic, 1949-1969 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973), chapter 5.
3. Han Hsiang-yang, Chi-hua sheng-yü chih-shih wen-ta (Questions and answers concerning knowledge of planned fertility), 2nd ed. (Peking: Jen-min wei-sheng ch'u-pan she, 1974), pp. 1-2.
4. For a recent account of women's role in "supporting half of heaven" in China, see Wilfred Burchett with Rewi Alley, China: The Quality of Life (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), chapter 5.
5. According to reports given by commune officials, there are 59,500 persons in 15,000 households in Ch'ang-sha Commune, 59,000 persons in 10,630 households in Huan-ch'eng Commune, and 68,000 persons in 15,950 households in Ta-li Commune.
6. The crude birth rate in this case is estimated roughly based on the report that the brigade's current population is over 5,700 and that there were 105 births in 1976 compared with 300 or so "some years ago."
7. Evidence of the existence of traditional family values appears in many press discussions and reports.
8. For a description of planned fertility committees at various regional levels, see Pi-chao Chen, Population and Health Policy in the People's Republic of China (Washington, D.C.: Interdisciplinary Communications Program, Smithsonian Institution, 1976), pp. 85-87.



9. Blackboard posters (hei-pan pao) are usually written on a blackboard in white or coloured chalk. The size of the characters in these posters is usually smaller than that in big character posters (ta-tzu pao).
10. Renmin Ribao, July 30, 1973.
11. Renmin Ribao, April 14, 1975.
12. The following are some examples: Han Hsiang-yang, op. cit. Shu Huai-yin and Pa Ching-yang, Fu-nü wei-sheng wen-ta (Questions and answers concerning health of women) (Shenyang: Liao-ning jen-min ch'u-pan she, 1976); and Chi-hua sheng-yü hsieh-tso tsu, Chi-hua sheng-yü (Planned fertility) (Peking: Jen-min ch'u-pan she, 1975). In addition, an example of a book on the subject of planned fertility and health in general prepared especially for women in rural areas is Lin Ch'iao-chih, Chou Hua-k'ang, and Hsia Chung-fu, Nung-ts'un fu-yu wei-sheng ch'ang-shih wen-ta (Questions and answers concerning common knowledge of health of women and children in the rural areas) (Peking: Jen-min wei-sheng ch'u-pan she, 1975).
13. Chi-hua sheng-yü wen-i hsuan-ch'uan ch'ai-liao hui-pian (A collection of literary and artistic propaganda material for planned fertility) (Peking: Jen-min wei-sheng ch'u-pan she, 1974).
14. Ibid., pp. 28-29.
15. The term that is often used to describe the organization and holding of such hsüeh-hsi sessions is pan-pan.
16. No figures of birth targets are mentioned or obtainable in this particular field trip. In Chen's report, it is indicated that the target birth rate typically aimed at by a commune is something like 22 per thousand, which would serve as a non-binding guideline. See Pi-chao Chen, op. cit., p. 95.